SIGNET

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Signet

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COLORFUL CONTENTMENT

Marcia Cooke

Isn't it nice to feel a sense of belonging?
Nothing brings quicker smiles than faces that
brighten when you arrive.
Precious moments to remember
Look back and be content.

Little things that add so much!
A hot date—
With a bad phone voice
That special night;
Arrival—a redder shade of white!

Moments that stand out in the mind.
How do you do it? Your hair, I mean.
Simple if you've got what it takes.
Oh hi! That wig, straight and black, sure looks good.
Hints—a whiter shade of black.

Thrilling moments complete a total experience.
Fantastic time—afterwards—teach me how!
Spastic bodies imitate penquins and rubber bands
Just not the same—I can't—you're right.
Funkedelic—a browner shade of white.

Experiences that can never be forgotten
All in a maze,
Survival becomes a matter of finding
The right direction.
Looking back, find contentment,
But only because you're not there anymore.

☆ ☆ ☆

FIRE AND RAIN

Marcia Cooke

Rain beats softly upon the window,
Before me a fire blazes.
Bright orange—flames lick at the dried logs.

Rain that reminds me of a collection of pin pricks;
Pains that make one big hurt,
As the drops make one big puddle.

Hands that reach out like the greedy flames.
All grabbing for some part of me.
No contentment until I am reduced to so many little pieces.

Sounds of crackling and moaning wood.
Consumed by flame, breaking, finally.
So much in common—that old burnt and broken log and

Me.

SUPER NIGGER

Marcia Cooke

Social emotion to the point of academic blank.
Damn she's cool, more like funny!
What are you doing here?
Watch out—Super Nigger has arrived!

A mini mind humbles itself to
Partake of the fruits of the vine.
One Afro for every hundred blonds.
Not bad—Super Nigger is in the groove.

We become the Great White Hope;
Enough smiles, generosity and concern—
Go out—tell those other Nigras we're not that bad.
Cop Out—Super Nigger does your thing.

Survival of the unfit,
For a while that's how it feels.
We fall, but in falling learn how important it is to stand.
Fake out—Super Nigger fooled everybody!

TRANSFORMED

Marcia Cooke

Everything's closing in!
Smiles that dash in and hide behind glassy empty eyes.
Greetings high and shrill, just noise that falls
Like shiney new pennies in an old tin pan.

Hands that make stiff jerky motions
Across the distance, reaching out
While bodies are guided by feet
That go in opposite directions.

Everything's closing in!
Even I imitate the tinny sounds
And jerky movements, and catch myself
Screeching in mid sentence.

I realize it's not me!
Constantly fighting off the pressures
Of transformation, I wonder
But for the perpetual smile and glazed eyes,
Would I belong? ?

THE VEIL

Marcia Cooke

It hangs,
So sheer that one can almost see
What lies behind
Covered in illusion, shrouded in mystery.

Its shape
Uncertain, moving with and yet against the eyes
That come
To pierce its darkness.

It reflects
The self-made image, showing
A portrait,
Of its intruder.

Smoothly woven, a fabric
Heavy, yet flowing endlessly.
At any moment ready to reveal
The secrets entangled beneath its threads.

The veil, first soft,
And again deep and harsh
Covers all
Guards the soul.

This dark illusive web
Hides the inner parts of myself from me
Keeping away from others
That which even I cannot bear to see.

THIS CHILD

Marcia Cooke

Standing beside the door or
    Hovering in a corner.
A nameless, faceless waif
    Alone by choice and yet by chance
Unknown to all and yet well known.

She watches the world whirl by
    From eyes that see and yet have
Never seen.
    A pale reflection flicks and darts
From eyes focused on a dream.

Waiting for an outstretched hand
    A warm and friendly grasp
To hold on tight and never release,
    Keeping her safe and soothing her,
Dispelling all her childish fears.

Tiny ears wait still to hear a word
    Just one, so soft and kind
Yet strong enough to guide and teach and break
    Through walls of silence.

But still she hovers in her corner
    Quietly enfolded in the chill.
Alone forever, so silent and still.
    This child of the world waits
Unseen, unknown, unloved.

SHADOWLINE

E. T. Weiant

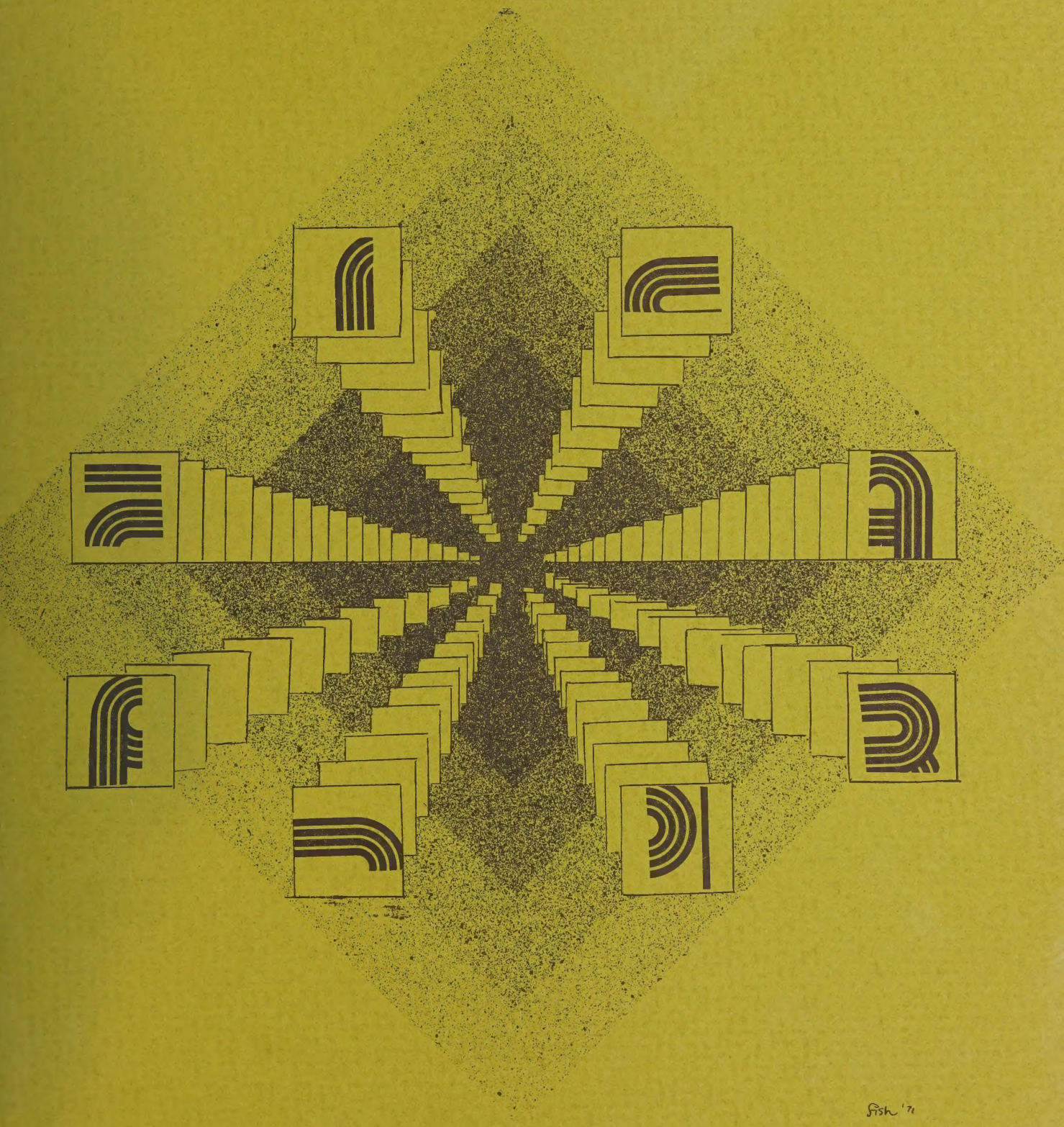
The Historical Society meets today.
Across the road the members gather
near the country church
beneath the water oaks.
From here—I get the distant view our discipline requires.
A Carolina tapestry:
    Like willows by the miller's pond,
    matronic millinery droops
    above the harmless punch.
    A few old-fashioned gentlemen,
    on loan from Currier & Ives,
    strike lithographic poses on the lawn
    without the benefit of bourbon.

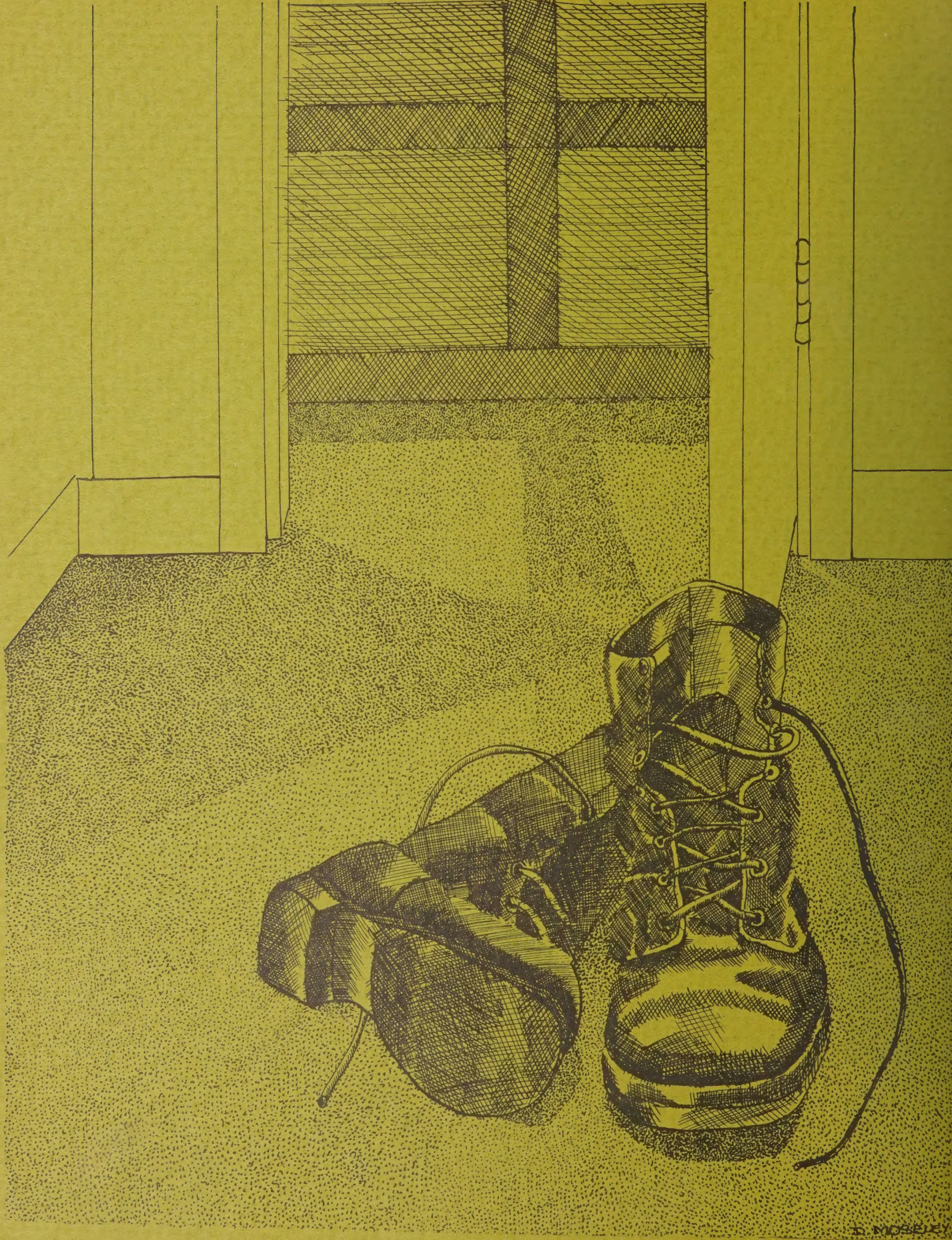
On my side of Route 16
the crushed stone path complains
of every step I take
from block to basking granite block,
from this to that address
along a tidy evenue of headstones
bobbing in the withered turf,—
legbones treading water in the dust.
I sample names for sound and flavor,
snack on dates and epitaphs
of castaways who crave to be remembered.

Between this arid meadow and the woods,
a ruined wall of field-stone
reaffirms the shadowline that separates the dead.
Gibbous rocks, like mossy turtles,
ramble off into the fields again,
while berry-canes and ivy overcome
the angular retainers left behind
to guard the symmetry of this divided churchyard.

Beyond the barrier the dark earth yields.
Beneath my foot the sod acknowledges my touch.
I hear the dampened power of black and orange roots.
They grunt like wrestlers that grapple in the depths.
Live emeralds spill
from tall translucent stalks of jewel-weed
to dye the air a deliquescent yellow-green.
I breathe it in through long-forgotten gills!
From my upper lip I let a silver bubble go.
It rises toward some blue domain
beyond the over-arching filaments
that make this place beyond the wall,
this stoneless cemetery for our slaves,
a cool aquarium.

Old Providence Presbyterian. . .
How ambiguously apt.
Did He provide it so?
Or did Man alone provide himselves
with separate
but equal graves?


Fish '71


D. MOSELEY

PORCH LIGHT

Gayle Adcock

It was muggy on summer days. Clothes clamped to your body no matter how you wiggled your shoulders or pulled at your shirt tail, you couldn't get free. I was too old to go without a shirt, so I used to stretch out on the cold cement porch after supper to watch passing cars or the meetings in the Holiness Church across the street. The European Linden tree looked cramped in the small yard of our apartment but it rustled occasionally to cool the air. But the heat always came back.

The Addison's lived next door with their three teenage daughters. Rock and roll blasted from the far side of their house so that a steady pulse but not the words of the music reached me. I always recognized "Blue Suede Shoes," though. They had taught me to dance to that one.

Just as inevitably the smell of strong perked coffee drifted from the house and Edgar with a steaming cup came on the porch in grey factory pants and a sleeveless t-shirt. He'd drink and he'd sweat and he'd rock until 11:30 every night of the summer, and I'd watch him through the banister around the porch as I laid my damp head on the cool floor and scraped the cord of dirt and sweat from around my throat.

He beat Lee for not going to church with her boyfriend one Sunday night when she said she was. He took her into the bathroom and she screamed until she fell against the tub and he walked out on her. Then she slammed and locked the door and peroxided her hair so that when she came out he beat her again. She didn't cry that time. He refilled his cup and went back to the porch and tried to get the parakeet to talk to him. Then she looked at me like I'd hit her so I went back home and sat in my room with the lights off trying to figure out what she'd done wrong. I watched Edgar through the window until he picked up the cage and his cup and went in.

As cars passed I named the makes and models. My brother and his friends knew them all back to 1950. They always got away after supper before I could find out where they were going and follow. So until the gang passed back through on their way to the creek or Mrs. McGhee's, I lay on the cement. Like going in the ice house, but it wasn't wet.

On Wednesday's people walking in two's and three's would begin making their way into church across the street. They shouted to each other as much as a block apart.

"Hurry up brothers. The spirit won't wait for those who tarry."

The doors were never closed and I watched them roll in the center aisle and sway if they were standing, shouting whenever they felt like it. It made me restless. I wanted to move too for a few minutes of relief from the heat that the stir would give—to lose my head for awhile, not to feel alone.

I'd roll over on my back and stare at the porch light Maggie had turned on. Moths thrashed in the heat like the people in church except butting their heads again and again against the bulb. If the boys would just come back, I woudn't have to watch it.

Eventually they had to pass by and I'd fly from the porch dropping in behind while they muttered.

"Hey, Ferkie. Can't you do something about this kid."

"Look I know you got some dolls. Go somewhere else."

I played deaf and kept position in the rear, since my brother didn't say anything on mother's orders. We were going to Mrs. McGhee's house. She was a witch. Her son had a spell on him so he still talked like a first-grader if he talked at all and his eyes would go wild when a dog or group of children came near him. Once in awhile he'd try to come to one of us but only when we were alone, and not being able to say anything once he'd gotten up to you, he'd run back to his house.

And now Mrs. McGhee wanted me. Everytime I passed alone, she would call me on the porch and try to get me inside.

"I have a doll you'd like. Three feet high with blonde hair. If you come to live with me, I'll give her to you. Mr. McGhee's no company. He's never been exactly right. Come on Sandy."

Mrs. McGhee called her own son Mr. McGhee in front of us, so none of us knew his first name; but I didn't want to stay long enough to find out. That doll looked like Cindy Peterson. She had yellow-blonde hair and good eyes. I hated her.

Mrs. McGhee had shown it to me through the screen once. I should have knocked the old woman down and run with it just to say I had it.

Now the whole gang was on their way to catch a glimpse of her through her kitchen window. She chained Mr. McGhee somewhere at night because she was always in the kitchen alone and she was a witch. We ran and crouched behind the hedge outside her window and saw her bringing bottles to sit in it. Her yellow-white streaked hair was down and the skinny cord it formed crawled over her shoulder and on down her gown. Then as she bent her head out of sight, we huddled close together. The steam from Larry's body made the back of my neck and face hot so I pulled my t-shirt way out at the neck and tucked my face down to wipe it off. I wasn't supposed to do that any more so I let it go and then it was droopy and my face was still sweaty.

She was asking the devil for me. But then her head came up wet and she poured shampoo on to lather it up. We slipped out from behind the hedge and went home, promising to meet back there the next day when Mr. McGhee would be out in the yard to find out where she kept him.

The next afternoon, the gang started their walk down the block and saw Mr. McGhee sitting in the front yard in the full sun with sweat pouring down his face. He always smiled. He was dressed all in starched khaki with white suspenders and white socks and his eyes were golden brown too. They were always expecting something.

The boys surrounded him as he tried to stand up and they started questioning him like they'd seen on T.V.

"What does she do with you at night?"

"Does she tie you up?"

Mr. McGhee tried to get away, but every way he turned he kept bumping into one of them. Stepping, jerking back, stepping another way, jerking back again, his head swinging from side to side looking for a way out. Finally, Mrs. McGhee came to the door.

"Y'all leave Mr. McGhee alone. Get out of here."

They had all run except me. I stood on the sidewalk where I had watched the boys start in on Mr. McGhee until he had sat back down. He had tears rolling down to his lips, looking from me to his mother. He didn't lick them off. They're hot and salty and make you feel better if you lick them slow. Mama and Daddy went to the beach one summer without me. I stayed at Grandmamma's and she left me upstairs by myself to cry it out. We didn't have an upstairs at my house so I stayed the rest of the week.

Mr. McGhee let his tears roll down and drop on the front of his khaki work shirt until Mrs. McGhee put a handkerchief in his hand and raised them both to his face. Then she looked at me.

"Come inside and see my doll. I'll let you hold it."

I looked at Mr. McGhee one more time and ran back up the block trying to catch the boys, but they had probably ducked through somebody's back yard and I couldn't catch them when they did that. Instead I went home and sprawled on the cool porch still hearing Mrs. McGhee calling me.

"Come back Sandy. I wouldn't hurt you."

I turned on my back letting my chest rise and fall like a swing and stared at the cold light bulb overhead. Mr. McGhee was a moth running into the boys over and over. But he cried.

II

When I answered the phone at about ten o'clock on summer mornings, I expected it to be Mrs. Booth telling me to tell Mama to get the clothes off the line. Gordon Barton was on his way, so I'd call the Addison's or run over and tell them. Then I'd run back to get the clothes off the end of the clothesline that sagged, while Mama got the rest. The clothes were never dry by ten. The nylon slips and pants felt limp and stuck to my arms as I carried them through the musty basement up the stairs to drop them on the kitchen table.

I couldn't blame Gordon. He didn't know what he did was wrong and he was always happy with all the clothes he piled on himself from everybody's clotheslines.

Mama was right behind me and we got all the lingerie in before Gordon came into sight at the bottom of the hill beside our house. He'd already been several other places and he had a pair of woman's underpants pulled on over his trousers as far as they would go, just above the knee. He had pulled on a hot pink slip over his shirt and topped himself off with a beige bra stretched across his chest without his arms through the straps.

Smiling, walking straight into the sun, he didn't squint like most people. He just kept coming up the hill as if to meet it, wearing blue jeans with a red or green plaid shirt and white socks. His skin stayed tanned and tough because he walked year round and his eyes looked far off even when he looked a you.

Finally reaching the backyard, he glanced up and down for more lingerie. I came back out just as his face was about to draw into a frown and he flashed back into a smile.

"Gordon pretty. You got something for Gordon?"

"Gordon, you can't have stuff off people's lines. Let's walk to the store."

"You ain't got nothing for Gordon?"

Mama walked out with a penny and handed it to Gordon. His face brightened up again while he hiked up the slip to pull out his money. Other places he had been had beaten him to their clothes too and had given him a penny instead. So he pulled out three pennies and took the one frm us.

My great-granddaddy used to give Ferkie and me money every Sunday but he never gave us the same amount and we got into fights so that Daddy had to even it out after we left. Great-granddaddy gave this other little girl in the neighborhood money too and carried her school picture in his billfold so I never gave him one of me. Neither did Ferkie.

"Gordon got five pennies."

"No, you've got four pennies."

"Uhuh, Gordon got five pennies. Gotta go."

He walked on and I went back in the house. Gordon didn't care what was right or what people gave him as long as he got something. He loved women's things more than anything and there was no stopping him if it was on the line. His mother tried to come with him most of the time to tell the neighbors she'd bring it back the next day; but she was old and some days she couldn't come because Gordon walked in the heat of the day. On the days she could come, she walked beside him talking into his ear the whole time, but Gordon looked straight ahead.

He went from our house down the block, but it was the last day he came for a week and most of the neighborhood was worried. So Mama called to find out if he was sick and found out from his mother that a new woman in the neighborhood hadn't understood how Gordon was. Trying to protect her clothes from him, she had accused him of attacking her so that Gordon was in jail. Mama had to go testify that he was harmless and that it was just a mistake. Our courthouse wasn't like T.V. Inside it looked like an old school and there was a

snack counter just inside the door. The doors were fakes too—painted copper, not real metal. The judge was skinny.

They brought Gordon in in his jeans and plaid shirt but he didn't have any extras on top. His head was drooping for the first time and when he saw the woman who had him up, he tried again and again to pull away from the policeman.

"Gordon want to be pretty. You ain't got nothing for Gordon?"

The woman pretended not to see him as the officer forced him into a seat and she kept her eyes on the judge in an "I told you so" stare. Her fingernails were long and red with chips of polish missing around the edges and her black hair was teased and sprayed stiff. She walked to the stand stiff like an old woman with arthritis.

As I laid on the bed that night with the covers thrown off and the window fan pulling in air over my body, her words kept reminding me of something I'd known before.

"He just kept coming back at me when I tried to push him off. I even tried beating on his chest but he wouldn't back off."

Her fingernails were like blood, but Gordon was out.

III

We moved when I was in the sixth grade and I had to transfer to a county school. I thought I'd hate it, because there was nobody my age in the neighborhood, but I always had Ferkie and he liked me more than he used to. Probably because we didn't go to the same school anymore. I used to get sick alot at first, not to have to go, and I'd call my grandmother to come and get me if Mother wasn't home. She didn't believe I was sick but she came and got me anyway and we watched T.V. all afternoon.

Mrs. Hester moved my seat every week after I had gotten to know everybody. I didn't like the Civil War or word problems so I talked during those periods and got a "D" in Self-Control. Finally, she moved me beside Claiborne as a last resort. We sat over in a corner by ourselves with a table and a filing cabinet. He was retarded but he drove a car to school and we had alot to talk about. I had dogs and he worked at his father's veterinary hospital, so he had a big ring of keys on his belt and would keep me informed on what kind of dog and disease went with which key at that time. I had just about decided to be a vet, but I couldn't stand the way he smelled.

My Boxer had puppies all the time when we lived in the city, and I went to help hold them when it was time to have their tails clipped. The vet had a big pair of scissors, and you could hear the gristle in the puppy's tail snap just before the scissors snapped closed and the puppy screamed. Then he'd sew it up with a crooked needle and thread he said was cat gut. I didn't care where he got it as long as it wasn't from a dog; so that didn't bother me, but then he'd offer me the cut-off tails. The oblong bits of fuzz would be laying on the stainless steel table with a little point of gristle showing, before he scraped them up for me to see. I never wanted them. The puppies couldn't eat without falling over into their dish and getting pablum all over their faces for at least a week after.

Claiborne brought an alarm clock to school with him and set it for twelve o'clock every day. The sixth grade wasn't supposed to go to lunch until one, but when the clock went off he had to go and have the whole class with him, so Mrs. Hester changed lunch hours with the fifth grade. After lunch we had to go on the playground for twenty minutes to walk around. Claiborne used to make the little kids out for recess play what he wanted to play while the rest of us sat in groups and talked.

After lunch we came back in for language period and put homework sentences on the board. Claiborne always had his, because his mother did them for him. They were even written in small, curly handwriting; but he kicked Tommy once for saying he hadn't done them himself and then he couldn't come to classes for three days. He still came to school every morning, though, and walked around the halls all day. The principal couldn't do anything, if his parents wouldn't admit he was retarded, so nobody bothered him.

Then he got in trouble with the police for speeding. He had been doing eighty in a thirty-five zone and hit a speed trap. He kept backing up and hitting it over and over again doing eighty until the policeman finally got him to stop. Claiborne stopped but when the policeman came up to his car, he had the windows rolled up and the doors locked. From then on he rode a riding lawnmower to school and everywhere else he went.

One day when I walked to the road to get the mail, he rode by. He was in white work pants and shirt from the vets and they stuck to his wet back. His hair, still in an out-of-style flat top, sparkled with perspiration that ran down his face. His large lips spread back into a smile flashing his spaced, protruding teeth and I waved as he passed.

My mother read in the paper that he'd been an usher in his sister's wedding back in June. They even had a country club reception. Ferkie had been in my cousin's that same summer, but I hadn't been asked. He had his braces off already and I didn't. Everything had to be perfect so she asked her fiance's cousin to be a junior bridesmaid to walk out with Ferkie. She was pretty but she giggled all the time.

Twenty years standin', like a
chair of the public
Rested in, but never owned
or even claimed.
Better to be a blunted blade
on some close-cropped hill,
And, digested in, passing part
of grazing beasts.
Yes, that would be better,
never to die alone,
But be exhaled into the night
of a thousand vapors.

NADA

Graham Sturgis

YESTERDAYS

Marcia Cooke

I took a walk and found a dream.
Ages and ages ago it seems,
But then, was it only yesterday?

Through fields, over hills, under trees
That lifted arms to the sun;
Feeling cool brown earth beneath my feet.

Tall grass lifting slender arms,
Reaching out to me, Mother Earth
Calling her child to suckle.

Deep emerald waters sliding over solid
Rock. Whispering gently to the wind,
Its gentle hands nudging snowy clouds along.

So calm, so much peace.
No hurry, only time passing
By so slowly that no one seems to notice.

I wish I could return or better find another
Calm spot on this earth.
They seem so few and those that are—always
So hard to find.

I want so much to go back,
To step so carefree into yesterday.
But the mind revolves, time presses close,
Life clutches madly at the soul; and I can
No more return to that spot than I can
Step back into yesterday.

Dreams of yesterday are best forgotten.
But my mind holds fast to the thought.
Foolishly I reach for times past. For
Like many, only too late will I realize
That all my yesterdays are gone.

Rain on the roof
round sounds in hollow places.
Eating scrambled eggs with spoons and fingers.
Your eyes
above the plate
make me think of chocolate pie and cocoa.
Coming back this morning
avec votre petite cadeau
taken from some poor, befuddled hen
Some puddle must have tripped you with a
sly and muddy paw.
One egg broke,
little bits of shell and
no glue
no tears, *le troitoir avois le faim aussi!*
Happy nose,
stuck in a blueberry muffin
no butter?
No, it's on your fingers—little sausages
sweet and warm.
If today was sunny they'd be burned.
The spoon on the empty glass
ringing *huit teures.*
Two shoelaces,
strings of words coming back down the hall to me
wiggling out the door.
Rain and leftover eggs
cold on the plate
no coffee,
just an empty cup
filling with sugarspoon echos.

UNTITLED NO. 2

Mary Crow

UNTITLED NO. 1

Mary Crow

But I remember
afternoons of tamden bike summers
when our short legs
wouldn't turn the pedals anymore
and you would meet us,
swinging the white gate as wide as your smile.
We'd drink lemonade
while watching you cut flowers
and waiting for the afternoon
to be rinsed and cooled with showers.
But now you look so sad.

Ah no, my dear, if I seem so
it's only that my smile is tired
and gone inside my face
where it is cool and dark and can find rest.
Isn't your bike rusted by now
since last you rode it to my gate?

But I only went away once since then,
well twice, no
maybe three. . .

I think t'was four, dear one
and such a long, long time between!
Now run along downstairs,
I think I hear them mixing lemonade.
Dry your eyes;
I'll meet you in the shade.

WHO ARE YOU—WHY?

Nadia Rasheed

Who are you?
I talk to you
though I cannot see you—
I feel the warmth of your breath
though I cannot imagine your mouth—
I find comfort in your eyes
though I do not know their color—
I run for security in your arms
though I cannot measure their embrace—
Tell me who you are.

I am here—
I am your listener.
Your words hit against me
and are flung back to your ears—
I surround you as a sounding board.
I soothe the sting of a freshly opened wound.
I calm the howl of instant anger.
I warm the burning cold of loneliness.
I am a part of you.

Have you become a part of me
born in my brain?
Or were you always with me
since I floated in the womb?
Did I invent you to stamp seals of approval upon my thoughts?
Have I created you as the Romans created gods
or as my neighbors create gods by the dozens?
Were you singled out by the mind-doctors to be named conscience?
My insecurity drives me to label you—
Is conscience then your name?
Are you both god and conscience
one and in the same?

I am mumbling—a prayer?
You are my protector against myself—
why do you love me?
I must name you and reach out for you in order to cope—
with what?
My life weaves itself into a web—
strings that *I* loop and knot.
The ends tie me to other men like monkey-lines
that join seamen on the back of a captured whale—
Rocking with the currents of the ocean,
the stinking whale threatens their shaky balance
even though its dead.

Life is churning under my feet—
I feel the pull of the lines around my waist—
My hands are raw and sore
as I grip the wet-burned rope.
My partners steady me
but I may yet fall—
Drowning us all.

Protect other men from me—
Protect me against myself.
Alone in one circular bond or prison of my life-ropes,
it tightens, strangling me
or loosens as I slip through—
Are you there?

I am here.
I am behind you to secure the knots that you tie.
Though you cannot feel my heat
I am the friction below your tread.
I dry the glassy whale—
Though you slide, you do not fall.
Look into the polished side and see the other men—
I am your mirror though you cannot rub my flatness.

It is sad that you must name me to reach me—
Worship me: I am your god. Respect me: I am your conscience.
Abuse me: I am you.
I am here—
I need no name.
I am with you
I am.

NO SPRINGS—HONEST WEIGHT
Not for me.
Let equality and justice
go to hell
where everything is parcelled out
as each of us deserves.
Who needs enamelled Torquemadas
from Toledo?
Not I or anyone
who deals with my shady God
whose heavy thumb
illegally releases
all the hidden springs.

PSALM

E. T. Weiant

RELAX

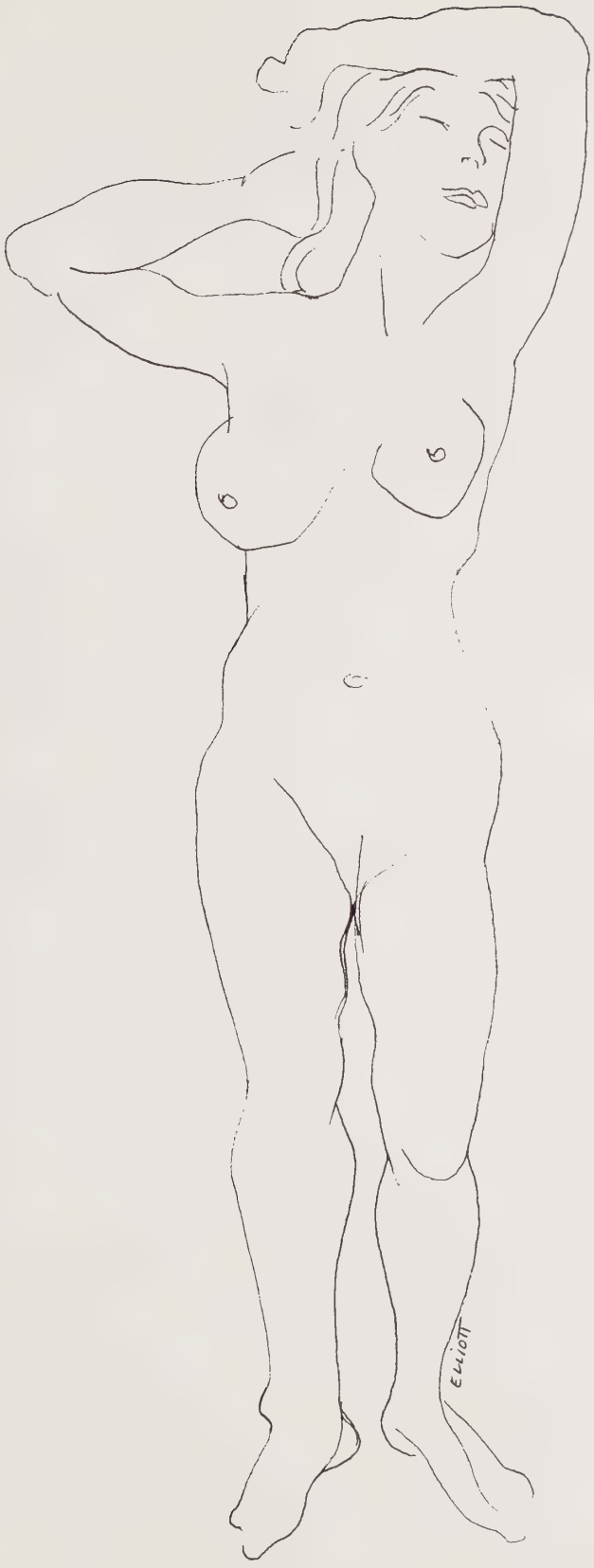
Anonymous

White stockings and clinic shoes conspire
To squish out virgin virgin virgin
Down the hall; The door opens,
"The doctor will be right in."

Great! He comes.
"Relax, I just want to look at you."
Boys in prepared dorm rooms say that.
Boys in off-campus apartments say more.

Back against the white cold sheet
Prepared for Sunday School
But not much more. Then
Fucked up with rubberized fingers.

Relax! Every girls wants
Simultaneously to be a nun
and a gypsy whore—God—Anything
But stainless steel pricks and rubber fingers.


ELLIOTT

MAGIC

Mary Crow

The magic began in the early afternoon, when the sun had warmed the sidewalks too hot for bare feet and hung, a huge piece of butterscotch, too high for taking. It was only after the noonday dishes had been washed and put away and the kitchens were quiet that the tinny tinkle of her cart could be heard on the uneven cobbles of the street. Then all the bare feet that had been cooling in the shade would grab shoes and run towards the sound, pushing and dropping quarters. In the awesome presence of a huge yellow umbrella, all chatter ceased as a semi-circle of red noses pressed against the three walls of glass around the top of the little green cart. On the fourth side stood Sara and under silent scrutiny she made magic.

She never said a word, but all knew her name was Sara because she had it embroidered in neat red letters on the collar of a freshly starched white blouse. As her hands performed the spell, the tiny silver-rimmed glasses perched on her nose made her gray eyes sparkle like two Christmas balls covered in glitter. With a grand sweep of her left hand, Sara scooped a cupful of pale pink powder from a hidden place and held it above her head, letting the contents pour slowly down, down, down into the huge white bowl before her in a sparkling mist of dry pink rain. Seeing the anxious eyes around her, she would smile, bobbing her head like a life size puppet, reassuring with her dimples that the best was yet to come. Flourishing a cupful of honey colored liquid in her right hand she would click her tongue as it dripped into the bowl with measured dips of her wrist. Then with a broader smile that exposed two rows of gold capped teeth and a wink of her glitter eyes, she pushed some secret button and a strange humming began that grew with each gyration of the bowl. Faster and faster it spun while Sara took squares of white paper and holding them before the watching faces, twisted them into slender cones with practiced fingers. And suddenly the bowl was filled with pink clouds come down to earth at Sara's bidding and she would chuckle at the sound of ooh's and ahh's which bubbled from the spectators. One in each hand, she would dip the cones into the spinning clouds, quickly so that they wouldn't have a chance to float away. Captured on the paper the pink fluff seemed enormous and the quarters, damp with expectation would disappear into Sara's pocket as the products of her magic exchanged hands. One by one the crowd would wander off absorbed in dissolving the sweetness and Sara would smile and nod and wipe her hands on her apron, knowing that her magic would be waited for again.

UNTITLED NO. 3

Mary Crow

The house was so old that the mossy oaks surrounding it seemed to be only uplifted arms sprung from roots which the house had sunk deep into the ground over the years. All had the same aura of gentle swaying which comes with the hunched brooding of age. The trees cast a shadow upon the roof which spilled like a dark stain over the rusted gutter and down the front until it ran off into the dirt of the front yard. From there the muddied color rose again in dull green ropes of ivy that snake-danced up the stucco walls like centipedes on so many cilia-like legs. Where the ivy had been turned aside by the masonry of windowsills, it had encircled them with constricting bands of waxiness, woven in between the lattices of shutters and laced across the window glass in patterns once prevailing only in white curtains hung within. On brilliant mornings long since faded, passersby made mental note of spring's arrival by observing the brightness of new white framed by the freshly painted shutter green. But now the curtains told of more northern springs and several winters had stayed behind to chap the paint of the shutters and flake it away like so much tinted snow. When the wind failed to carry it away, it stuck to the walls, speckling them like mold on bits of egg shell.

The front door, carved panels of heavy oak, swung like a poorly hung pendulum from one hinge. Before the hinge had broken, making entry easy, careless rocks had shattered the tiny panes of colored glass in the side windows and the fanlight that ran like colored ribbons up and over the door. Little bits of glass that had crumbled in the black iron filigree framework, lay scattered on the porch like antique stones dropped out of their setting. The boards of the porch were roughered silver for, long since, the varnish had warn away with rain and sun and the curious feet of small boys and dogs. Two wicker rockers leaned against one wall of the house, tilted back like two old men conversing with sighs and muffled coughs when the afternoon became too hot for speech. Breezes that blew up the cobbled walk, stirred the thistles sprouting prickly green in the cracks of the steps where sandy soil had collected to receive the seed dropped by birds that took their meals on the porche's edge. If the breeze was strong enough to push the door wide open it could pass inside the house, where not being met by anyone, it passed along to blow out the screen door at the end of the hall, returning to the friendlier sunshine, and left the house alone again.

From where I stood, leaning against the stunted oak trees that grew just outside the wrought iron fence, I looked upon the pale, immobile front of the house like one who stares at the motionless face of a maiden aunt who has recently died. As if drawn to the open casket by an invisible string of memories of long letter, brown wrapped Christmas packages and beach-side summers. I stood, reflecting time as the shadows of the tree's leaves reflected their solemn green on my upturned face. The house had been my Aunt Adelia's and suddenly she was staring back at me. From the upstairs windows which the sea winds still kept scoured clean, the white crescent of her perpetual smile spread across the buff and pink oval of her face. With the same look of amused distractedness that had made the tiny piper's feet dance around her eyes, she gazed down at me now. I felt myself shring back to the seventh summer size that had been mine at the last gathering of our whole family here at this house. Caught by mutual holidays, we had lingered and expanded wide and warm in the sunshine, toasting ourselves until we crackled with good humor and crinkly laughter.

Why we always chose Adelia's house I can't remember, except that there was high cool space inside to be gregarious in, enormous windows to watch, The rainy days trickle by and fireplaces in every room. And there was the beach, and the sea that murmured answers to our childish questions and reminded us of our parents' warnings not to go too far away. And, of course, there was Adelia. Small and terribly delicate, she skittered through the days, smiling and gigling in a high pitched ripple that always made me look up toward the sea gulls circling overhead. Whenever she moved there was a moving pool of frivolity around her that spread itself in tiny waves to all the rest of us. Snatching tidbits from each breezeway of activity she passed them around in the same generous way that she did the plates of sugary cookies and frothy glasses of lemonade. Her eyes would shine with the glazed translucent blueness of the ocean and her hair would wave its loose tendrils like the sea grass in the breeze.

As she looked at me now, she reached up to push the hair out of her eyes and when she did so the window was suddenly empty and she had vanished back into the smokey crystal of the airy vastness in the empty house, returning to my memory. All my extra years swelled in me again and choked the words that had almost burst our when I thought I saw her face. Tears trickled in hot eddies of salt, making tiny furrows in my cheeks. I wanted to go back—to the sandcastles that were dissolving inside me and oozing out my eyes. But only for a moment. Rising to the top of the rippled, innocent glee of the gulls that still were sailing overhead, I breathed deeply in the sharp breeze which slapped my face. Bending down, I picked up a shell, bleached white as dry bone and turned it over in my hand. The inside was still pink and shiny, glowing softly in the green spring lit air filtering through the tree over me. Putting it carefully into my pocket I turned and walked away.

SCHOOLROOM

Gayle Adcock

She only kept one child after school today. They were gradually becoming more disciplined and she kept fewer in. The classroom showed their improvement. Each desk was lined up exactly with the one in front of it and the front desk of each row was placed on a masking-tape marker on the floor so that the rows were straight. The floor was also clear except for a few slivers of orange and gold construction paper that could be easily caught up in the janitor's oiled mop. The eraser and board duty, posted behind her desk, had been checked off by the appointed monitors for that day to show they had done their jobs, and the erasers were back in their places spaced evenly along the board, propped at forty-five degree angles with one large piece of chalk on the top of each one. Sunlight was blocked from the room by white fluorescent lighting, because it made students lazy and she caught them daydreaming when the sun flashed in the windows.

Now that the students were gone, she straightened her desk so that she would be prepared for the next day without delaying to look for her material. Each pile of papers on her desk was clipped together, ready for the student's individual files after she had recorded the grade. The only ornament on her desk was her mother's picture that she had brought from Germany after her marriage. As she flipped the page of her plan book to recheck her materials for her lessons, her eyes caught the picture and she realized how much the face in the small, oval frame had become her own. Her mother had blonde hair pulled and pinned at the back of her head in a large circular braid just as she did. Her full lips and large white teeth always smiled but her bottomless blue eyes were still—dead. They never had tears or happiness in them.

The pupil she had kept after school had been busy until now. Noticing the sudden stillness as she stopped straightening her desk, he looked up to see if she were quietly staring at him waiting for his attention as she often did. He watched her as she stood staring down at her desk. She was very tall and lean, unlike most of the women he knew. Her arms were straight and had no obvious muscles like his mother who worked in the fields with the men. Still, he had felt her grip on his shoulder and he knew she was strong. Her shoulders were wide and square under the boxy suits she wore to school and her step was firm, even when she walked from her desk to the board. Her perfume was different from most of the women he knew. His mother and other teachers smelled like roses or lavender, but she smelled fresh instead of sweet, like she had bathed in rain.

"Mrs. Ellis, I've finished them sentences you told me to do."

"THOSE sentences."

"Yes ma'am. THOSE sentences."

"You may go as soon as your father comes for you."

"Aw, he may forgit. He's doin' hogs and he always loses track of time when he's messin' with his hogs."

"We'll wait a few more minutes. You may put your things away now."

He began putting his papers and books in his desk, as she watched his movements and his resemblance to his father. They were almost identical in features and Benjie tried to be like his father, a local tenant farmer. His father had been kicked by a horse and walked with a slight stiffness in his right knee. Benjie had the same stiffness even though his knee was normal. And today she had caught him chewing tobacco on the playground during recess. Every morning he came in in the middle of the Pledge of Allegiance, and his father was fifteen minutes late for the appointment she had called and made with him just a few hours ago. As she continued to study Benjie's face, the door to her classroom banged open and his father came in muddy and congenial as always.

"Got my boy have you, Anna? Guess school don't fit with him no more than it did with me, but he's made it to the fourth grade."

"J.S., I found him with this."

She pushed the sampled square of Red Man tobacco towards him as he walked cautiously to the front of the class to take it.

"Uh . . . Anna, you got to excuse me today. I been castratin' them hogs and I got shit all over me."

She jerked her head toward Benjie. He was practicing the cool, Elvis Pressley grin his father always used.

"You may go Benjie . . . I just thought you should know, J.S."

The two turned and walked out in time with each other, each with a slight stiffness in his right knee.

She stopped to catch her breath.
To rest along the way.
Along the riverbank.
She dropped her net
of garden vegetables.
They roll in the grass with her shoes.
She scattered her stockings
her ribbons and rings,
her petticoats and
everything!
She flings down a city
with abandon!
Let me stop!—to catch my breath.
to wait with all the rest
until the hot Ukrainian sky
gone skinny-dipping in the Dnepr
comes back
to claim her own.

KIEV

E. T. Weiant

RECOLLECTIONS

E. T. Weiant

If all my picture puzzles,
in a laminate of many scenes—
five hundred, let us say—
receive the blessing of the Template
and are cut at once
by jig-directed saws
into a quarter of a million pieces
and are jumbled all together
in a box without a name,
what amusement is there
but to recollect
in ordered chaos
the segments
of a mutable mosaic?

Shifting,
changing,
like a cloud of stars
beneath my fingertips,
my poem moves
according to
a Grand and Idiotic Choreography.

THE BEHEADED CHICKEN

A short story written by
Horacio Quiroga
Translated by
Vicki Glover

All day long, seated in the patio on a bench, were four idiot sons of the Mazzini-Ferraz marriage. Their tongues lay hanging between their lips, and with stupid eyes, they turned their heads with their mouths open.

The patio was made of dirt, and closed at the west side by a brick fence. The bench lay parallel to the fence, five meters away, and there they sat without moving, with fixed eyes on the bricks. Because the sun hid himself behind the hill when descending, the idiots would have a party. The blinding light caught their attention at first, little by little their eyes livened. They laughed at last, congested by the same hilarious anxiey, looking at the sun with bestial joy, as if it were being eaten up.

Other times, lined on the bench, may hours zoomed by as they imitated the electric tram. The loud noises shaked their energy, and they then ran around the patio, biting their tongues and grunting. But almost always they were caught in their legarthic idiocy, and they passed the day seated on their bench quietly, with legs hanging, and their trousers soaking up the glutinous saliva.

The oldest was twelve years old, and the youngest, eight. By his dirty and unkempt look, one noted the absolute lack of maternal affection.

Those four idiots, however, had been an enchantment to the parents one day long ago. When the marriage was only three months old, Mazzini and Bertha oriented their fulfilled love of husband and wife and wife and husband toward a much more vital coming: a son. What better gift for two lovers than that honored consagration of affection, freed from vile selfishness of a mutual, eternal love, and, what is worse for love itself, without hope for possible renovation?

So Bertha and Mazzini felt, and when their son was born, after fourteen months of marriage, they believed their happiness was fulfilled. The creature grew beautifully and radiantly until he was a year and a half old. But when he was twenty months old, one night he was shaken with terrible convultions and the next morning, he no longer knew his parents. The doctor examined him with that professional attention that is visibly looking for the cause of the malady in the illnesses of the parents.

After several days, the paralized limbs of the creature recovered their movement, but his intelligence, his soul, even his instinct had all disappeared. He had become profoundly idiotic, sluggish, hanging, dead forever over his mother's knees.

"Son, my dear son!", cried the mother over this ruin of her firstborn.

The father, desolate, accompanied the doctor outside.

"To you I can say this: I think this is a lost case. He could get better, educate himself in what is permitted by an idiot, but it won't go beyond that."

"Yes! . . . yes!" said Bazzini. "But, tell me: do you think he inherited it, that . . .?"

"As far as paternal inheritance, I already told you when I saw your son. In respect to the mother, there is a lung that doesn't breathe well. I don't see anything more, but there is a crude malfunction. Make her get an examination."

With his soul destroyed by remorse, Mazzini doubled his love for his son, the little idiot that paid the excess of the grandfather. He had to console and sustain Bertha at the same time, as she was wounded most deeply by that failure of her young maternity.

Naturally, the marriage put all its love in the hope of another son. He was born, and with his health and cleanliness of his laughter, it rekindled the hope. But when he was eighteen months old, the convultions of the first-born were repeated, and the next day, the second son awoke an idiot.

This time, the parents fell into deep desperation. Their blood, their love was wrong! Their love, moreover! He, twenty eight, she, twenty two and for all their passionate affection, they could create *at least* one atom of normal life. They no longer asked for beauty or intelligence, as they had for their firstborn! But a son, a son like any other!

Out of the new disaster, new flames of hurt love grew, one crazy desire to redeem their sanity of their tenderness once and for all, and forever. Then came twins, and step by step the process was repeated.

On top of their immense bitterness, Mazzini and Bertha had great compassion for their four sons. They didn't know how to swallow, to change places, nor to sit down. They learned to walk, at last, but they crashed into everything, for they didn't notice the obstacles. When they washed themselves, they grunted until their faces were infected with blood. They livened only when they ate or watched brilliant colors or when they heard thunder. They laughed then, sticking out their tongues and spitting rivers of slobber, raident with bestial frenzy. They had only a certain imitative faculty; but they didn't progress beyond that.

It semed that the terrorized descent was concluded with the twins. But, after three years passed, Mazzini and Bertha ardently desired another child, confident that because of the long passing of time, this wouldn't happen again.

They didn't satisfy their hopes, and with this ardent desire, they fought. Until this time, each had taken their corresponding part in their misery for their sons, but that necessity arose to blame others.

They began the change of pronouns: *your* sons. And the atmosphere was heavy.

"It seems to me," Mazzini said, who had just entered and washed his hands, "that you could keep the boys cleaner."

Bertha continued reading as if she hadn't heard.

"It's the first time," she replied after a while, "that I've seen you bothered by the state of your sons."

Mazzini turned his head a bit with a forced smile.

"Of *our* sons, it seems to me. . ."

"Well then, of our sons. Do you like it like that?" she raised her eyes.

This time Mazzini expressed himself very clearly.

"I don't think you would say I'm to blame, no?'"

"Oh no," smiled Bertha very pale, "but not myself, either, I suppose. . ." she mumurred.

"What?"

"That if anyone is to blame, it is not me, do you understand that well?! That is what I wanted to tell you."

Her husband looked at her a moment, with a brutal desire to insult her.

"Let's stop!" he said at last, pulling out his hands.

"As you wish; but if you mean. . ."

"Bertha!"

"As you wish."

This was the first clash, and others followed. But in their inevitable reconciliation, their souls united, doubling their hope for another child.

A girl was born. They lived two years in anguish, always waiting for another disaster.

Nothing happened, however, and the parents put all their indulgence into their daughter.

Even if Bertha had taken care of her sons, when little Bertha was born, she forgot the others. Her only memory horrified her like something atrocious they had been obligated to commit. Mazzini felt the same way, to a lesser degree. But it wasn't because of this that peace filled their souls. At the littlest indisposition of their daughter, with the terror of losing her, all their rancors were brought forth, from their rotten descent. They had lost each others respect; and if the male feels dragged with cruel satisfaction, he begins to humiliate a person.

Now that this child was born, each one, attributing the guilt to themselves, felt the infamy of the four that the other had forced him to create.

With these feelings, there was no possible affection for the four older sons. The servant dressed them, fed them, put them to bed, with visible brutality. She rarely washed them. They passed the day seated in front of the bench, abandoned from any remote affection.

In this way, little Bertha turned four years old, and that night, from the tid bits that her parents found impossible to refuse her, the creature had shivers and a fever. And the fear to see her die or to become an idiot, reopened an infinite terror.

Three hours passed without talking to each other, and the motive was, as always, Mazzini's loud steps.

"My God! Can't you walk more softly? How many times. . .?"

"Well, it's just that I forget; I don't do it on purpose."

She smiled scornfully.

"No, no I don't believe you."

"And I never would have believed you . . . little one!"

"What, what did you say?"

"Nothing!"

"Yes, I heard something. Look: I don't know what you said, but I swear that I would prefer anything else than having a father like yours!"

Mazzini paled.

"At last!" he murmurred in clenched teeth, "at last, viper, you've said what you wanted!"

"Yes, viper yes! But I had sane parents. You hear? Sane! My father didn't die with delirium! I would have had sons like everyone else! Those are yours sons, your four!"

Mazzini exploded.

"Viper! That is what I told you, what I wanted to say! Ask him, ask the doctor who had the blame for your son's meningitis, my father or your bad lung, viper!"

They continued with more violence, until a cry from little Bertha instantly sealed their mouths. At 1:00 in the morning, they indigestion had disappeared, and, as always with your marrieds that have intensly loved each other even at one time, the reconciliation took place as effusive as their aggravations.

A splendid day began, and while Bertha got up, she spat blood. The emotions and a bad night, had without a doubt, to blame. Mazzini held her for a long time, and she cried desperately, but neither dared say a word.

At 10:00 they decided to go out after lunching. Because they hardly had time, they ordered the servant to kill a chicken. The day, radiant, had pulled the idiots from their bench. So that while the servant was beheading the animal in the kitchen (Bertha had learned this good way of preserving the freshness of the meat from her mother) she thought she heard breathing behind her. She turned and saw the four idiots, with their shoulders stuck to one another, staring stupified at the operation. Red . . . red. . .

"Ma'am! The boys are here in the kitchen."

Bertha came, she never wanted them to step there. Land not even in these hours of pardon, oblivion and reconquered happiness could avoid this horrible vision! Because, naturally, while her love for her husband and child were so intense, her humor was more irritated with the monsters.

"Make them leave, Bertha! Throw them out! Throw them out I tell you!" The four beasts, shaken, brutally pushed, went back to the bench.

After lunch, everyone left. The maid went to Buenos Aires and the marrieds walked through the farm. They returned when the sun set; but Bertha wanted to talk to the neighbors in front for a moment. Her daughter escaped at once into the house.

Meanwhile, the idiots had not left their bench all day. The sun had set, and they continued to watch the bricks, more inert than ever.

All of a sudden, something intervened between their look and the fence. Their sister, tired of four paternal hours, wanted to observe herself by herself. Stopped at the foot of the fence, she stared pensively at the crest. She wanted to climb it, there was no doubt. At last she decided on a chair, but she didn't reach the fence. She then resorted to a can of kerosene, and with her topographical instinct, she put the can vertically to the piece of furniture, and she succeeded.

The four idiots, with an indifferent look, looked at their sister who could patiently dominate her equilibrium and how, on tip toes, she held her throat over the crest of the hill with her trembling hands. They saw her look on all sides for support for her foot to raise herself.

But the idiot's stare had livened; a same insistent light was fixed in their pupils. They didn't take theor eyes off their sister while an increasive sensation of beastly desire was forming in each line of their faces. The little one felt her leg held. Below her, the eight eyes pierced into hers, and that frightened her.

"Let me go! Leave me alone!" she screamed, shaking her leg.

"Mother, oh mother! Mother, father!" she cried. She still tried to hold on to the border, but she was pulled off and fell.

"Mother, oh mo. . ." she could no longer scream. One of them squeezed her neck, parting her locks as if they were feathers, and the others dragged her with one leg into the kitchen, where the chicken had been beheaded that morning, very tight, tearing the life out of her second by second.

Mazzini, in the house in front, thought he heard his daughter's voice.

"It seems that she is calling you," he told Bertha.

They listened, but heard nothing more. A moment after they said goodbye, and while Bertha was leaving her hat, Mazzini advanced to the patio.

"Little Bertha!"

No one answered.

"Little Bertha!" he said louder, his voice now changed.

And the silence was so funereal for his infinitely terrorized heart, that his back freezed with a horrible premonition.

"My daughter, my daughter!" He now ran desperately toward the back. But as he passed the kitchen, he saw a sea of blood on the floor. He violently pushed the door open, and let out a scream of horror.

Bertha, who had begun running when hearing the anguished call of the father, heard the cry and answered with another. But upon entering the kitchen, Mazzini, livid as death, intervened, holding her back.

"Don't enter! Don't enter!"

Bertha managed to see the floor flooded with blood. She could only throw her arms over her head and plunge into the house with a hoarse sigh.

REALITY

Marcia Cooke

Walls close in around them.
And even within that tiny spoce,
Misery stretches out icy fingers
And holds fast to their souls.

Nights are long and cold.
Sweaty summers come and go;
Still the chill of desperation
Remains.

Bodies press and souls join.
Even there, no fulfillment.
It ends, with moans and screams.
No satisfaction, only reality after a brief escape.

Agony and defeat at every turn.
Wretching misery with every breath.
A man-made hell from which there is no escape.
Here—all is black.

D. MORFIEY

BROWNELL

THE CYCLIST

Jim Winn

As the sun's first rays brought light to one corner of the sky, a lone motorcylist traveled at a steady speed down a country road. His eyes were heavy from the all night ride, and his arms and legs stiff at every joint. He was young, not over twenty-two, and his muscular body seemed to fit naturally on the large cycle.

Houses became more plentiful along the road, and far away the red glare from a traffic light could be distinguished among the morning colors. As the cyclist approached the empty intersection he slowed to anticipate the change of the light. As the green light appeared the bike tilted to the left and accelerated. The smell of salt hung in the air, but the water was not yet in sight. The dunes on his right hid all but the pale blue morning sky above the water.

The bike slowed in an area where there were no houses for several hundred yards in either direction. As the cycle edged off the road, a smooth spray of sand flew out from under both tires. Accelerating again, it easily climbed the grassy dune.

The beach appeared in a sudden burst of daylight as the bike carefully made its way to the darker sand ahead. The cyclist shut off the engine several yards from the water, and the bike slowly rolled a few feet further. He sat in the same position for a moment looking out into the water, and then up and down along the isolated beach.

As the morning breeze ripped at his jacket, he raised one hand and unsnapped his helmet, then pulled it over his ears and shook his head, freeing his hair to the cool air. He lifted one leg over the bike and stood for a moment looking out over the water.

Feeling the blood move through his body again, he strapped the helmet to the seat and slowly removed his jacket. With the same slow movements he removed the rest of his clothes and folded each garmet over the bike's seat. His feet began to move his body toward the water as if he had no control over them. Then, as if summoned to the rescue by a drowning victim, he ran into the water, splashing and struggling to stay on his feet and then under. Moments later he was neck deep in the salty water, splashing water high into the air as each wave erputed over his head. The cool water released a hidden pocket of energy, that seemed to lubricate his entire body until he could bend and flip in every direction.

All at once his movements stopped, and he stared toward the cycle. There was something there in front of it. It sat still, and it sat alone. He didn't take his eyes off the figure as his feet struggled with the currents trying to move out of the water and toward the cycle. As he pulled himself from the last big wave, he was able to make out the figure of a young girl. He moved slowly toward her as she sat cuddled from the brisk morning air. She had short blond hair and summer skin with freckles. A large, dark, long-sleeved sweatshirt hung loosely on her frail figure, and a small black kitten crawled between her arms as she stared at the naked figure before her.

The cool breeze whipped across his wet body, but he didn't shiver. He stood facing the young girl, wondering how she could have suddenly appeared from nowhere.

She tried to look into his eyes and then looked down at the kitten and stroked its head. "Kitten and I thought we'd come down and watch you swim," she said in a casual voice. "We were sitting up the beach when you got here." She looked up at him briefly and then continued to play with the kitten.

He stood in front of her a few seconds, then walked around her and untied the ragged pack on the back of the bike and fumbled through it. Convinced that it was in order, he put on his pants over his wet legs and stuffed the other clothes into the pack. The girl continued to play with the kitten.

Without looking at her again he pulled the helmet over his ears, pushed up the stand on the bike and felt for the key to turn the machine on. It was gone.

The girl sat still and the kitten cried. "Give me the key," he said softly. The girl didn't move, and seconds passed as he waited for an answer.

Finally, she spoke, but as if speaking to the kitten. "I used to come to this place all the time when I was little. It's so peaceful; nobody ever comes here."

Again there was silence as the wind made the only sounds for a few long seconds.

"Give me the key," he said with no change in his voice. "I need the key now."

"Daddy and I live up the beach in a little house. There aren't any other kids around here to talk to, though. That's why Daddy loves it so much, but sometimes I get kinda' lonely, so I come down here to see the sunrise. " She talked while she stroked and cuddled the kitten. "Daddy went. . ."

"Are you going to give me the key?" he demanded, losing patience.

". . . Went on a business trip and is going to be gone all week, so I have to do everything at the house by myself. I don't like it when he goes away and leaves me here. I get scared sometimes at night, and I can't go to sleep."

"Little girl, I . . ."

"I'm fourteen."

"I want you to give me the key, now."

"My birthday's in May, but Daddy forgot about it last month, so on his birthday I'm going to make an extra-special cake and celebrate my birthday too. But his birthday's not until September—September the fifth."

The cyclist got off his bike and walked up to the girl, who remained in the same position stroking the kitten. She didn't look up at him. He knelt down and lifted her chin with his forefinger and said, "Give me the key."

She peeked up at him through her freckles. "I don't have it," she mumbled, and looked back down at the kitten.

"You have the key, now let me have it."

"I don't have it."

He grabbed her by the shoulders. Her right hand held the kitten, and her left had was covered by the long sleeve of the sweatshirt. "Is the key in that hand?" he asked, looking at her left arm. She stared at the arm and didn't say anything. The kitten cried. He grabbed the sleeve of the sweatshirt and pulled it back. Her hand was missing; only an ugly scar remained at her wrist. He jumped away from her and turned toward the water. She picked up the kitten, put it in her lap again and pulled the sweatshirt over her arm, so that it appeared once again that her hand hung loosely underneath.

She continued talking in a little girl way as if nothing had happened, "Daddy and I used to take long walks on the beach and talk about all kinds of things, but he spends a lot of time with Miss Laney now, and he says I'm old enough to take care of myself. Miss Laney's his girlfriend, but he doesn't like her enough to marry her. He doesn't like her as much as he liked my mother."

While the girl talked the cyclist stared out into the water. Too many things were happening to him; everything was going too fast. Once your mind gets started spinning, you can't stop it. Glenda's suicide started it all. Then Jerry was picked up in L.A.— God, they caught him with fifteen pounds. Then nearly losing everything last night; it was too close. Things keep happening and you can't stop spinning, except when you're riding; then it's OK.

He turned back to her, "Listen, please give me the key. I have to go, now, please." He was pleading with her, and it made his head spin faster, "Give me the key now!"

"I'll tell you where it is if you will come back to the house with me and let me fix us some breakfast." Her eyes looked up at him again, and he couldn't answer. "I can fry scrambled eggs and bacon. I do it all the time for Daddy when he's here." She carefully added, "Please."

He rubbed his hand through his hair and finally said, "OK OK, but just for a few minutes; I've go to get somewhere."

She jumped to her feet and picked up the kitten, "It's just right up there. I can fix eggs in no time. One time Daddy woke up and said," she lowered her chin and said in a deep voice, "I have to go in one minute. Get up and fix those eggs." She giggled, "I got up and had two eggs on his plate before he could even wink."

The cyclist tried not to listen to the girl's idle talk; he simply pushed his bike along side of her and thought about a lot of things. There was too much to think about, and your thoughts get all messed up.

"Usually Daddy gets me up early, before the sun comes up, because he has to be at work really early. I fix him a big breakfast and then come out here to see the sunrise everyday, except when it's raining." She cuddled the kitten as she walked and used her left arm to brace its head. "I found her all by herself on the beach last week. I couldn't find her mother, so I gave her some milik and took care of her. She likes to come see the sunrise with me." She looked at the cyclist as he pushed the bike and asked, "Hey, can you tell if it's a boy or a girl? I can't tell the difference." She held it up to him, and he looked away. "Oh well," she said "I can't give her a name until I find out which one she is. Daddy won't let me have a kitten, so I can't ask him. He's allergic to them, so I hide her in my room. He doesn't sneeze if he doesn't see her." They walked on.

When they arrived at the beach house, the cyclist became uneasy and finally blurted out, "Give me that key, now!"

"Will you come in and have breakfast if I tell you where it is."

"Yea yea," he said quickly, "Where is it?"

She thought a second and looked up at him, "Kitten swallowed it." She stood expressionless, waiting for him to say something. Finally she giggled, "Guess we'll have to wait until she goes to the bathroom, huh?"

He looked down at the kitten then slowly walked to the back of the cycle.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

He pulled out a knife, opened the blade and stroked it across his palm. The girl swooped up the kitten and held it in her sweatshirt. "No, kiteen doesn't have it. I do. I have it." She backed against the wall and cowered down, cuddling the kitten tightly to her chest. She cried in sobs as the cyclist clutched the knife in his hand.

"Where?"

She sobbed louder, "I swallowed it." She tucked her head to her knee and cried.

Nervously, he stared at her, and then at the blade of the knife, and again at the girl. For several long seconds she sobbed as he rubbed his fingers on the blade. All he wanted was to be far away, far away from everybody, but things kept happening. He put the knife back into the pack and tied it down. The girl watched him. Without looking back at her, he gripped the bike, turned it around and pushed it away from the beach house and down the beach. After he had gone several yards, the girl yelled, "Wait a second," and ran toward him. He walked on, and she had to run to keep up.

"Well, don't you want it?" She held it out and wiped her eyes with the sleeve of her sweatshirt. The wind blew her hair and the kitten cried.

Without looking at her he took the key and put it into the ignition.

"Hey," she said softly, "where you going?"

He looked at her briefly, then turned the key.

He left the beach and climbed the white dunes. The soft sand flew up into the air from the tires and was lost in the wind. The bike accelerated down the last dune and glided onto the highway. It was daylight now, and the road was straight. The drowning roar of the cycle felt good again. It was natural, perhaps the only natural thing he knew; the only thing that kept his head from spinning so fast.

THE GREAT MESS-UP IN HEAVEN

Reedie Floyd

The sun rising pulls back the curtains of fluffy clouds which enclose her and presents a great smile. The beams of her wide grin fall upon the face of Pinko who sits in the midst of a cotton candy colored cloud. Pinko swings his bushy red hair and blinks his green eyes while trying to pin-point the source of a fluttering sound that he hears.

About his head, he sees Rapub who is flying down to join him. Pinko and Rapub has long been living in opposite corners of heaven every since Rapub's accident and his revenge upon Pinko.

Pinko talking to his co-worker says:

"How many do you think we'll handle today?"

"Not too many." Rapub answers in his usual dull voice.

"Our requisition shows a need for one hundred and one whites, three hundred yellows, seventy-five reds, and one hundred and one blacks."

"Yeah, I wonder what's the occasion?" replies Pinko rubbing his ear.

Rapub returns, "I don't know but let's get to work. One hundred and one whites!" "Yeah, but one hundred and one blacks too," Pinko adds.

Pinko's small hands grab a rope and pull steadily until a huge vat of paint falls into line with three other vats. In big bright letters on the front of each vat are names of colors: black, white, yellow, and red.

Rapub busies himself lining up a huge drain pipe with the mouth of one of the vats. The drain pipe is padded on the inside with smooth leather material that is just right for a nice comfortable slide right into the vat of color.

Now Rapub pulls up the loosely hanging sleeve of his sparkling white robe and checks his clown-faced watch for the time. After glancing at the watch, he smiles and then continues his work which is now checking to make sure each vat is full of paint.

Pinko, impatiently looking about while scratching his rear end, smiles impishly. This should be quite a day for him. Today, he is going to cause Rapub's heavenly white wings to turn gray and sag. Now his grin broadens as he asks the time.

"One minute of ten o'clock" is the reply. Rapub is always so straightforward, so precise and so unbearably the perfect angel.

"Here come the babies. Let's do the red ones first," blurts out Pinko.

"Today, I will make one hundred and one heavenly white babies and Pinko can make one hundred and one of the other kind", purrs Rapub.

Before the noon sun lessens her grin as does Pinko, for deep thoughts run through his egg-shaped head. Thoughts of how he could get back at Rapub. These thoughts lead him into his memories. These memories cause his tiny heart to quicken its pace much the same as a child quickening its step to keep up with his mother. Continuing with his day dreaming, he looks down at his black and white stained robe and remembers the time about five years ago when he and Rapub had been friends working closely together just like a lock and a key, but, one day the lock froze and the key no longer turned.

He remembers how one day Rapub (while laughing with him over a very silly matter) fell into a vat of black paint. Then was the time when Rapub begin to hate black things because he only saw them as trouble. The black paint took about two weeks to wear off his wings. Because his wings were black and white all over, the other angels of all colors teased him and called him a tainted angel or the blackest angel of all. Rapub had always prized his great white wings and was very hurt so he blamed Pinko for his plight and vowed to get revenge.

One night while Pinko slept, Rapub painted Pinko's blonde hair red with a permanent paint. Of course, Pinko did not see the rascal who painted his hair, but he sensed that it was his now ex-friend, Rapub. Pinko is suddenly jerked out of his dream world by the shout of a loud voice.

"Here come the babies," the voice announces as Rapub's precise little hands carefully guide the first of the three hundred infants into the vat labeled yellow and if God were performing the task himself, though the sides at the bottom of the grey vat ooze yellow babies like water through a sifter, laughing and gurgling as they pass onto a velvet green conveyor belt. Pleasantly, Pinko smiles, pleased with the job performed by the almost statue-like figure, Rapub.

More babies are now coming and continue to tumble down the grey tunnel until all the babies are colored except for one over looked child. There are seventy-five orange-red ones doing war whoops with one feather in their hair, 300 yellow, moving bundles waving little white flags with a large red spot in the center, 101 pink-white infants with rattlers in the shape of apple pie, and a sticker on each rear end which reads, "I'm an all-American pink or blue," which has been changed by Rapub to read girl or boy so as not to get the colors pink and blue associated with black and white. Last but not least is a solid wall of darkness, 101 strong, doing the funky chicken and singing "I feel good". There are various degrees of blacks and browns because Pinko had purposely has forgotten to stir the paint.

Rapub would have turned in his wings if he had known that the babies are so varied in color, but he has a habit of leaving his glasses home so that no overly active baby could snatch them from his face on the way to the vat and its categorizing process. Because he leaves his glasses at home he sees no difference in colors but today Pinko has Rapub's glasses and he would show Rapub what they had been turning out for three years now.

At the end of the green conveyor belt are perfectly white storks, so white that the sun reflects brightly from their wings as each of them flies off with a little bundle of life.

The sun's rays reflect off the wings of the departing storks and strike the buxom face of Pinko as he remembers that the storks were once an egg-shell color but, just like the babies, they too were subjected to the vat.

The anger once again rises onto his face which quickly turns crimson and just as quickly pales when he spies the slightly pink babies sitting under the sign "white".

For a long time before, the white babies had been purely white but, Pinko changed this by arriving early each morning and adding ten drops of yellow and red along with one drop of black to the white. He also used white paint to change the purity of the other colors.

Pinko, now laughing to himself, gazes at the red and pink colored babies under the white sign and thanks God that Rapub had not known about the color variation or else he would have been kicked out of the baby division as a *downist radical. The moving conveyor shifts the position of the babies while Pinko watches.

Suddenly, a colorless bundle comes from within the yellow vat. Both Pinko and Rapub stare in amazement for this is the first time that either have seen a colorless baby more than two hours old. Pinko exclaims, "This baby must be two hours old." Watching Rapub take the baby into his arms, Pinko thinks to himself that this would be a better way of getting back at Rapub rather than letting him the different colored babies. This is the time to get revenge, color the baby black. But Rapub has other ideas. "What are you doing?" shouts Pinko "Put her down." Pinko shouts in a tone so commanding that Rapub lets the baby slide from his arms.

The baby craws back into the opening at the bottom of the vat. Now Rapub spreads his wings and scoops up a gallon of white paint on his way to the top of the yellow. "Don't," cries Pinko but his cry is to no avail, for Rapub empties his bucket into the yellow vat. "Surely now the baby is white", is Pinko's thought, but, he figures to undo the wrong with a bucket of black paint. Just as Rapub, he scoops up a bucket of black paint and empties his bucket into the vat.

As innocently as the child crawled in, she crawls out and displays her new colors. Rapub has his way and Pinko his, for the baby girl is exactly one half white and one half black. Realizing that they could not admit their error, the two angels decide to keep the little girl and raise her. Due to their extreme stubbornness, she received the name Half-n-Half.

Many years and as they pass the little girl grows into a beautiful young woman with long flowing locks of reddish brown hair which adorned her tan pink complection. Her obedience and lovable manner over the years soon caused the angels to see her as a beautiful young woman not her two conflicting colors.

And to this very day in heaven, there is a paint vat to remain forever to remind every angel of the great day that Half-n-Half arrived. The vat is a great tan cylinder with pink letters on it which identify it as miscellaneous, and from the rim hangs a sign which simply reads, "FOR USE ON EARTH IN THE YEAR 2000."

*downist—anyone who does deeds that could send him down to the world below.

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